

THE CLASH BETWEEN AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN CODE

Konflik Aturan Budaya Amerika dan Eropa

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ABSTRAK

Di dalam tiga karyanya yang berjudul "Four Meeting", "The Europeans" dan "Daisy Miller" Henry James mengungkapkan benturan-benturan aturan atau adat kebiasaan orang Amerika dan orang Eropa bila dua budaya ini dipertemukan. Selama pengamatannya, yang kemudian ia tuangkan ke dalam tiga karyanya yang dapat mewakili hampir semua karya-karyanya, ia mencatat bahwa masing-masing masyarakat mempunyai penilaian baik yang bersifat positif maupun negatif terhadap masing-masing pihak. James sebagai pengamat yang sangat cermat juga mempunyai kesan yang sama terhadap dua adat kebiasaan masing-masing budaya. Kadang-kadang ia memberi penilaian yang baik terhadap tatanan Eropa tetapi di lain pihak ia juga mencela tatanan tersebut. Eropa baginya maupun bagi kebanyakan orang Amerika merupakan suatu benua dengan budaya yang mantap sehingga Eropa menjadi lambang idola suatu budaya. Segala sesuatu yang berbau Eropa akan memberi rasa bangga dan keindahan, sedangkan Amerika adalah benua yang kosong dengan peradaban jauh di bawah peradaban Eropa sehingga kurang dapat memberi kesan yang serupa. Walaupun demikian orang Amerika adalah manusia yang sederhana dan lugu.

Menurut James hal-hal yang negatif yang melekat pada Eropa terletak pada perangai manusianya. Seperti yang ia ungkapkan di dalam "Four Meetings" orang Eropa ia gambarkan sebagai manusia yang "morally corrupted" (bejat moralnya). Orang Amerika di dalam karyanya yang berjudul "Daisy Miller" ia gambarkan sebagai orang-orang yang tidak tahu adat kebiasaan orang Eropa sehingga mereka dianggap sebagai orang yang kurang sopan. Di dalam novelnya yang berjudul "The Europeans" James menyampaikan kritiknya terhadap tatanan orang Puritan yang sangat kaku dan sekaligus ia juga kurang setuju dengan cara hidup orang Eropa yang "opportunistic".

Konflik semacam ini tidak akan pernah berakhir karena adat kebiasaan masing-masing pihak sampai kapan pun akan tetap berbeda walaupun masyarakat Amerika sebenarnya serumpun dengan masyarakat Eropa. Dari tulisan-tulisan James dapat disimpulkan bahwa pembauran dua kebudayaan akan dapat selaras jika masing-masing pihak dapat saling memahami dan hidup berdampingan dengan toleransi yang baik.

Kata kunci: konflik – aturan budaya – benturan budaya

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Henry James is a very talented writer whose fame is known in America and Europe. A critic named F.W. Dupee has written an article about James, found in Miller's (1962) *Major Writers of America*, that he knows tradition and is selective in his use of methods and values. James's stories and novels are "self-contained and self-explanatory" and his "scenes are highly allusive". Another critic, Robert L. Gale, states in Woodress's (1972) *Eight American Authors* that James is the most prolific and outstanding of writers in American literary circle.

The purposes of this analysis are to study James's illustration of the conflict between American and European social codes through his three works, namely, "Four Meetings", *The Europeans* and "Daisy Miller" and to inquire the influence of his life experience on these three works as the representatives of his creations. The focus of examination are on James's international theme in those three stories and on the degree of James's ability to reconcile the American and the European codes.

The theoretical approaches used in this text are literary approach, namely, the expressive approach, the cultural approaches, namely, diffusionism and functionalism and the psychological approach, namely, Freudian's daydreamer. The scope of study will be on the contrast between American and European social codes, that is, the disharmonious relationship between the two groups of people, the Europeanized American who represents the European and the American. A character analysis will be applied on "Four Meetings" and "Daisy Miller" and a plot analysis will be the basic core in the discussion of *The Europeans*. James's biography which appears in the discussion serves as a means of showing his mode of life.

Henry James's works, "Four Meetings", *The Europeans* and "Daisy Miller" can be regarded as representatives of his Comedy of Manners. In these three stories James illustrates the conflict between American and European social codes through the characters's action in associating with each culture. Throughout the stories there is one striking phenomenon which always appears, that is, the international theme. Some critics use certain terms to refer to this central discussion. For example, Bowden (1956) uses "international incident" to specify James's characteristic. Powers (1970) mentions "international scene" to designate the association between the two continents, namely, America and Europe. These terms are summed up by Powers (1970) as "the transatlantic intercourse of American and European society and culture."

In handling the international theme James brings up "the European and American ethos" (Bowden, 1956), and the distinctive development in the two civilizations. According to Jefferson (1960) the emphasis of James's novels and short stories is on "central, typical things, whether glamorous or homely, and on anything which serves to illustrate general differences between the Old and the New World."

The above topics are interesting but there is one particular subject that strikes me as the most challenging point to be investigated. The subject concerns the cultural clash. The distinction between the two civilizations emerges in James's three works, "Four Meetings", *The Europeans* and "Daisy Miller", can also be observed through the characters's manners in adapting themselves to

the new environment. This particular subject of adaptation will appear in each work in a different form. Each form will show the contrast between American and European codes.

In "Four Meetings" the clash is represented by the corrupting European attitude overpowering the innocent American, in *The Europeans* the presence of the Europeanized Americans in the rigid Puritan family brings up the conflict and the decorum of the naive Americans suddenly immerse in a European milieu causes the disharmonious relationship between the two groups of people, namely the American and the European. This incongruity is best observed in the contrast of a simple American manners and that of the correct and settled European's.

During the late nineteenth century both the American and the European have their own views upon each other. The images that they have are in opposition, that is, they attack each other in the sense that they both have negative opinion. The European generally thought that American lacked manners. The American "social texture was thin, raw, monotonous, undefined" (Holder, 1966). The country showed *aesthetic poverty* which can be seen from the people's customs. The American felt that the European is opportunistic. Besides the negative judgement, the American also make good comments on the European. To the American Europe presents cultivated milieu and aesthetic and cosmopolitan environment. This rich and complex social texture serves to show the contrast to the American condition. Because of its long established history of aristocracy the European supply the curious need of the American.

The contrasting codes as seen in "Four Meetings" is drawn from the collision between the innocent American, Miss Spencer, and the morally corrupted Europeanized American, her cousin. The interaction between the two parties gives rise to a moral sense in American side. James describes the American in "Four Meetings" as innocent, worshipful, honest and idealistic person who becomes a victim through the very fault of these qualities; while the European, represented by the Europeanized American is portrayed as an experienced individual who swindles the innocent American. This situation reflects the condemnation of Europe which, shown by contrast, makes the moral value of America more striking. The American flaw shows the insufficiency of American civilization.

Another example of the contrast between the two cultures is also depicted in James's novel, *The Europeans*. The clash of two opposing social groups is represented by the Puritanical American and the European portrayed by the opportunistic Europeanized Americans. The conflict is focused on the clash between ways of looking at life, namely, opportunity versus discipline. These opportunists are set on American ground to seek a fortune by marrying and painting their Puritan relatives. The opposition becomes evident because the institution of the rigid Puritan will not accept the value of the Europeans. Thus, the presence of the Europeans on the American ground makes the situation somewhat intense. To the Europeans this situation forms an obstacle to reach their goal.

The Puritanical bondage displayed in *The Europeans* takes the form of restrictions. The Puritanical Americans suffer from highly mannered world of

Puritan and cannot act naturally. They are the slave "to a predictable self-imposed pattern of behavior" (Dean, 1961). As a faithful Puritan, Mr. Wentworth who represents the Puritanical American, cannot accept the leisure way of life of the Europeans. He still holds the compulsive seriousness of labor and will not permit himself to be pleased by life other than that which comes from their recognition of duty to God, therefore, he regards painter's profession as mere idleness or evil that does not contribute to salvation. His concern of discipline reflects his preoccupation with virtue and salvation. On the other hand, the opportunistic European represented by the Europeanized American Felix Young looks at life as having a positive attitude towards pleasure and enjoyment.

These contrasting views reflects the conflict between Puritanical American and romantic European values. This in turn creates the unhappy atmosphere for the association of both American and European society. The "lack of any feeling for the arts goes beyond simplicity to a definite cultural lack, representative, it would seem, of the country itself" (Bowden, 1956). Thus, these clashing judgements point to two cultures at discount and also reflect James's sense of ridicule of American narrowness.

In the late of nineteenth century in which *The Europeans* was published (1878), the Puritanical American was unwilling to take James's criticism of it. The novel "cast a much harsher and almost unfavourable light on the general American scene" (Powers, 1970). According to Edel (1963) the "Boston readers were not amused" and the novel "set off a sharp flurry in the American press, and from this time on there was formed the legend that James was an expatriate who mocked his countrymen and exalted Europe at the expense of America" (Edel, 1963).

The strength of Puritanism in America during the past century makes it difficult for the American to believe that the romantic European could actually overpowering them. The American is culturally sensitive of this topic because as a catalytic force Puritanism "inspired intellectual and moral traits, particularly evident in American culture" (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1975). This distinguishing feature of America is highly valued in its society that the American find it difficult to consider the plot of *The Europeans* truly comic.

The clash between the two societies is brought up even more sharply in "Daisy Miller". As a reflection of his attitude towards traveling Americans in Europe, this short story, "Daisy Miller", serves its purpose. In James's letter to his mother he stated that these Americans have "the elements of the modern man with culture quite left out" (Zabel, ed., 1951). Unlike the Europeans, who have correct manners and conventional behavior, the Americans have not been "smoothed and polished by mutual social attrition" (Zabel, 1951); they lacked good manners in associating with the European. But for the Americans having good manners means loosing freedom of being themselves. However, if they act naturally like the way they do in America, they will be considered as improper.

James exposes the discourteous manners of the Americans through the Millers. This traveling-aristocratic-by wealth American-family displays indelicate conducts during their visit to Europe which causes unpleasant situation among the Europeanized Americans and the Romans. Their conducts, such as,

the eleven years old son's staying up late in a hotel parlour, the daughter's midnight randevouz with a gentleman friend at the Colosseum and her flirting with two gentlemen at the same time and the mother's ignorance of coming to a party unaccompanied, though they seem trivial to the American family, are considered, to some extent, as immoral by the Europeans.

James assures that

traditions, conventions, and manners were necessary for the smooth functioning of civilized society -- that one was obliged to do things in certain acceptable ways in order that civilized human intercourse be possible. ... To give oneself up to any institution was to lose something of one's independence; to give oneself up too easily or too completely was to risk losing all, to run the danger of becoming a kind of 'hollow man' who is nothing but his manners (Powers, 1970)

The Millers's conduct described above show their being innocent. They are innocent in the sense that they do not know the European social tradition. This condition is regarded by the European as crude. Even though they do not mean any harm to the European they stir up a serious gossip and cause problem for themselves just because they lack good manners.

According to James the problem of American in Europe is their inability to adapt themselves to the European social condition.

James saw clearly that compromise is necessary. The ultimate value is always the individual, but he must adapt conventional manners to himself in such a way as to have them express himself truly. To refuse the necessary compromise is as destructive as to yield completely -- as the case of Daisy Miller most dramatically demonstrates (Powers, 1970).

The American represented by the Millers cannot find a compromise when they associate with the European. They never even considered the possibility of doing so. The result is that they are not even accepted by the Europeanized American circle in Europe.

Daisy, the prominent character in "Daisy Miller", is the prototype of young American ladies in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Powers (1970) considers this young lady as an "aggressive American naive." Daisy and her family do not realize that European custom is different from those they have known in America. Accordingly, she and her family behave in Europe as they normally behave in America. For example, she flirts with two gentlemen at the same time. The mother lets the son of nine stay up until one o'clock in the morning in hotel parlor eating candy. The mother herself allows the daughter to go for a moonlight drive with a third-rate Roman. All their actions represent their failure to understand the manners of European society. In a deeper sense it can be inferred from these incidents that the family's code of etiquette, being that of a provincial American, has no authority of long tradition.

The qualities of the American are in contrast with those of the European especially when the two parties mingle. These qualities are associated with their social codes or the rules of conduct that are considered morally binding

upon the individual as a member of a particular group. The association between these two groups is sometimes disturbed just because of the differences of their rules of conduct. James stated the following remarks in 1872 which can be found in Cunliffe's (1974) *American Literature to 1900*, that

It's a complex fate, being an American, and one of the responsibilities it entails is fighting against a superstitious valuation of Europe.

This valuation causes the agitation between the two parties. James portrays the contrast between the two cultures vividly in "Daisy Miller."

Some of the European's rules of conduct presented in "Daisy Miller" which are in collision with the American's are, for instance, one should talk in reserve at first meeting, one should not induce others, and one should be prudent in the course of actions. On the other hand, the American's set of rules displayed by Daisy showed the lack of good manners. She talks openly, verberates with a stranger, accepts an invitation from a stranger, and induces others. Though they may look trivial, they cause awkward perception on the European side. And these in turn reflect the clash between the two cultures. The above illustrations also deal with American qualities, namely, American innocence and freedom. These qualities are also in conflict with the settled European trades.

The conflict of the two social codes not only reflects the tension between America and Europe during the late nineteenth century but also depicts James's inner conflict, that is, his marginal state. This is due to the fact that he excessively travels back and forth to both continents. His attachment to

Europe grows deeper yet his American conscience is stronger. Therefore, he is torn between the two worlds. Even though he chooses to become a British subject, he cannot deny his being an American. This conflict is never resolved. In other words, James cannot bring the two cultures in harmony.

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